



## SWVG coordinators report



### The coordinating team report on their activities

Sadly, early in the year a client was separated from her family and removed back to her home country. This was the first such case for a long time, but removal remains a very traumatic and undignified process.

However, altogether ten clients plus their five children received Leave to Remain, the majority with refugee status. These occasions are always greeted with great joy. The coordinators are then in regular contact to support the visitors who are guiding their clients through the difficult transition phase, finding somewhere to live, applying for Universal Credit and eventually finding a job.

Recently the public health group held focus group meetings at the Avenue Multi-cultural Centre, AMC, to gain a better understanding of the needs of people seeking asylum. Following this, meetings with Solent Mind were arranged to try and develop peer group support at AMC.

While of course there is the ongoing frustration about the inefficiency of the Home Office and long waiting times our clients have to endure, we have managed to get help with some unusual cases through our contact with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration. It has also given us direct access to government organisations and service providers such as Migrant Help and Clearsprings ReadyHomes. In September new government contracts with these groups were rolled out nationwide, promising to provide improvements in accommodation, better access to Migrant Help to help with applications and problems, as well as welfare provision. Together with CLEAR and the Red Cross we have been able to feed back directly and suggest improvements where the provision promised is still not satisfactory.

*Claudia Glyn, Elizabeth Prescott Decie, Chris Stephens, Xanthe Hackett*

## Nine year old Saul helps raise funds for SWVG



### Hazel Still reports on a walk along the Test Way with her grandson and other members of SWVG

The forecast on the 28<sup>th</sup> looked pretty dire, threatening lightning and rain. Was this walk, (even if only 8 miles) such a good idea especially with innocent grandson joining me, who immediately asked if we would be struck? Usual grandmotherly palliative remarks followed.

We checked in at Romsey, Saul stocked up on a bacon roll, then we were efficiently delivered by coach to Horsebridge. Apart from a torrential 10 minute downpour early on, weather helped us on our way, with only lightest showers and even sunshine. Lesley and Sue and partners caught us up after a while, having started in Stockbridge...they were all completing 11 miles. Natasha had clearly sprinted from Stockbridge, as we never saw her and she arrived at the finishing post a good hour ahead of us.

Saul and I completed our 8 miles, though by the end he was complaining of aching legs and sitting down rather a lot! More than compensation for the pain, was the medal at the end and the fact that he was interviewed by a man with “a proper microphone” and now proclaims himself “famous”.

It was a beautiful walk, intermittent glimpses of the Test through the trees, even a waterfall, and I would encourage anyone to join in next year. Saul was keen to spot trout at every bridge, which might be why we did not achieve record breaking time. He also found the biggest fir cone “I have ever seen” and a branch of Horse Chestnut which served as an umbrella...and of course conkers.

After he'd recovered with a hot bath and supper, Saul drew this picture of his walk.



Congratulations to all, especially to Lesley who raised over £2084 and to Sue for galvanising us all into walking and efficiently distributing mobile numbers so we could keep in touch. As usual the Rotary Club organisation was impeccable...no chance of straying off course. Overall we have raised approximately £5,000.

#### Donations to SWVG

Anonymous donation from a member £1,000  
W Draper £750

#### Fundraising events

Southampton quiz £162  
Sponsored walk £5,000

#### Grants

The French Huguenot Church of London Trust  
£5,000

# Asylum news update



LESSONS NOT LEARNED -A report on the failures of asylum decision-making in the UK

**A key revelation of the Windrush scandal was the Home Office's refusal to believe people's life stories even when they were backed up by evidence. Freedom from Torture, the charity founded by Helen Bamber, believes the same attitude pervades the entire asylum process and contributes to poor decision-making, with almost two out of every five asylum refusals corrected on appeal.**

Its review of 50 reports on the UK asylum system written by 17 respected organisations over the last 15 years shows that the Home Office has consistently ignored recommendations for improvement.

After examining the findings of parliamentary committees, the United Nations, non-governmental organisations, academics and independent inspectorates, the report's authors found a convergence of views on the fundamental causes of poor decision-making. These include flawed credibility assessments, the unrealistic and unlawful evidential burden placed on applicants, a starting point of disbelief and a broader 'refusal culture' in the ethos of the Home Office. "This, together with a flawed learning culture, has allowed deep-rooted systemic problems to proliferate."

Freedom from Torture believes these problems can only be solved with consistent commitment from the highest level of government. In an open letter, it calls for a complete overhaul of the asylum and immigration system with a culture which puts protection at its core.

SWVG has signed the letter and individuals can do the same by visiting [www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org).

## General Election

When parliamentary candidates come knocking, SWVG members have the chance to flag up the importance of rights for asylum seekers and refugees. The Campaign Group has put together a short summary proposing that they be given a fair hearing, fair treatment and fair opportunity.

For more information visit our website [swvg-refugees.org.uk](http://swvg-refugees.org.uk)

## CHALLENGE TO INTERROGATION OF 'REFUSED' ASYLUM SEEKERS

According to the Independent newspaper, the Home Office faces a court challenge over allowing asylum seekers to be interrogated by the countries they are trying to flee.

It follows evidence uncovered by the newspaper that Zimbabwean asylum seekers who fled political persecution were ordered to attend meetings with Zimbabwean officials after their applications were refused. They reported that they were asked 'distressing' questions.

This was believed to be part of an agreement between the two countries that Britain would "repatriate" at least 2,500 failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe providing that officials from the country could "vet" them beforehand. The Home Office did not deny these allegations.

Granting permission for a legal challenge, a High Court judge expressed concern about the alleged policy of collaboration with the Zimbabwean authorities and the fact that the Home Office had failed to provide any details about the practice.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Re-documentation interviews are a standard part of Home Office process where an interview is required by the receiving country to confirm identity and in order for a travel document to be produced."

## Distinguished guest

Sir Mark Lowcock, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Emergency Relief Coordinator, will be the guest speaker at SWVG's AGM on Monday 2nd December.



UNOCHA photograph

In the last year, nearly 132 million people have been in need of humanitarian protection. In his role as the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, Sir Mark has the daunting task of responding to conflict in Syria, the Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen, persistent drought in Afghanistan and so the list goes on.

OCHA's Under-Secretary-General does not just sit behind his desk formulating policies and issuing instructions. In his first full year in the post, which he took up in 2017, he visited 18 countries and witnessed the outcome of traumatic events at first hand.

Introducing the UN's 2019 Global Humanitarian Overview, he wrote, "I met desperate parents who did not know where their children's next meal would come from. I saw families forced to flee their homes and walk for weeks to find safety from

armed conflict or persecution based on their ethnicity and religious beliefs. I met survivors of natural disasters whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed. And I heard from people who have somehow managed to survive the most brutal horrors of war and who continue to hold out hope for peace and a better future."

Sir Mark points out that this level of extreme humanitarian need comes at a time when global wealth is higher than ever before.

"Despite global economic gains, 10 per cent of the world's people are still living in extreme poverty. At least 2 billion people worldwide live in areas affected by fragility, conflict and violence, where the intersection of poverty, high population growth, environmental degradation, natural hazards and protracted conflict leave them especially vulnerable."

However, he reports that the UN and other humanitarian agencies are now better at identifying needs and quicker to respond when disasters strike.

At the AGM, Sir Mark will be speaking about refugees and people displaced in their own country, whom he describes as the unluckiest and most vulnerable.



**Preparations for winter planting on the SWVG allotment in Southampton.**